

United States Army Chaplain Center and School

MINISTRY TO PERSONS OF OTHER FAITHS

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by

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America, since its beginning, has shown concern for the religious life of the individual. The rights of the individual to worship as he chooses was given protection in the opening words of the Bill of Rights: "Congress shall make no laws respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."¹

This makes it evident that "implicit in the First Amendment is the guarantee that religion in its various denominational forms may be freely exercised and propagated."²

In October, 1972, The Army Times, a military trade newspaper, published the results of a religious affiliation survey of a selected group of Army personnel. From this survey, it was noted that there are more Buddhist and Moslem enlisted men than there are Jewish. It was known that many of our young people of today have embraced these newer religions, but the numbers within the military setting were not so obvious.

In Peter Rowley's book, New Gods in America, he gives the approximate membership of these new religions.³ He points out that these figures are only approximate, but he states the membership is growing rapidly.

¹Leo Pfeffer, Creeds in Competition (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), p. 43.

²Eugene F. Klug, Church and State Under God, ed. by Albert G. Huegh (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 365.

³A listing of the religions and approximate membership can be found in Peter Rowley, New Gods in America (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1971), pp. 3 and 4.

His "reports indicate that growth in the latter part of 1970 may be as great as a million people seeking an answer to what seems to them a frightening world."⁴ This means that there will be over three million people belonging to these newer religions. Thirty years ago there were less than one hundred thousand.

Today the Military Chaplaincy finds itself facing this problem. How is the Chaplain to minister to these persons of other faiths?

"The legal origin of the Corps of Chaplains is to be found in a Resolution of the Continental Congress adopted 29 July, 1775."⁵ In the beginning, there were only Protestant Chaplains. "The Mexican War called attention to the need for Roman Catholic Chaplains."⁶ Two Roman Catholic Chaplains were appointed in 1846. As a result of a request made to President Lincoln by the Board of Delegates of American Israelites, the qualification section was changed on 17 July, 1862, to permit Jewish Chaplains to serve in the military.⁷

Since 1862, the Army has thought in terms of the traditional Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish faiths in regard to meeting the religious needs of its military family. The military has felt comfortable with this "all faith" arrangement. "If a special religious group appeared, it was treated in most cases as a denomination or subgroup of one of these major religious groups."⁸

⁴Ibid., p. 4.

⁵Department of the Army Pamphlet 165-1, The American Army Chaplaincy A Brief History (Department of the Army, October 1965), p. 2.

⁶Ibid., p. 7.

⁷Ibid., p. 8.

⁸Chaplain Training Packet, The New Cults Unfamiliar Religions (United States Army Chaplain School, Fort Hamilton, New York, April 1972), p. 1.

As we have already attempted to point out, there are members of religious groups in the military now whose needs are not and cannot be met by the present military "all faith" arrangement. What are we to do about these individual and group needs is the question and problem that we confront.

In a recent interview with Chaplain (Rear Admiral) Francis L. Garrett, Chief of Navy Chaplains and Chairman of the Armed Forces Chaplains Board, he was asked the question in regard to the newer religions and the need for chaplains to represent them. Chaplain Garrett stated that at this time none have made application to bring personnel on active duty. If an application was received it would be considered on the basis of need and the qualification of the persons involved in the application.⁹

From the response, it can be ascertained that there is no objection and no law that would prohibit ministers of the newer religious groups to serve as chaplains. This is further shown by events of the past as the author will attempt to show here. "In 1942, the War Department organized an all Greek Battalion and authorized a Greek Orthodox Chaplain" to serve with it.¹⁰ In 1943, when the 442d Infantry was organized composed of Japanese Americans who were mostly Buddhist, the Army sought to find Buddhist Chaplains, but none could be found who met the qualifications.¹¹ In 1969, a request was made by a Buddhist Company Commander of the 29th Infantry

⁹Chaplain (Rear Admiral) Francis L. Garrett, interview held during United Methodist Chaplains' Retreat, Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, November, 1973.

¹⁰Roy J. Honeywell, History, Chaplains of the United States Army (Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, Washington, D. C., 1958), p. 221.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 221.

Brigade in a letter to his Brigade Commander. This matter reached the Office of the Chief of Chaplains and is recorded in the Historical Review, Office of the Chief of Chaplains. "It pointed out that the Army can procure Buddhist Clergymen as chaplains only after the denominational headquarters asks for representation, the Armed Forces Chaplains Board approves the application on a basis of justifiable need, and educationally qualified applicants become available."¹²

The author believes that there should be chaplains from non-Judeo Christian faith groups commissioned for service. The author feels that the needs should be determined on the basis that is presently used for the procurement of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish chaplains. This author also believes that it is up to these denominational and faith groups to make their requests known and to find qualified applicants to serve. Their requests should follow the same channels as presently used.

But even in view of this, as one can see, something needs to be done in the meantime. It is evident that in many instances the needs of military personnel who are members of these new faith groups are not being met. What are the responsibilities of Jewish and Christian Chaplains for military personnel of other faiths?

Commanders at all levels have a responsibility to provide religious activities which serve the needs of persons of all faiths within their commands. Chaplains must be involved in carrying out the responsibility in this area. The chaplains' involvement may be the help needed in providing resources, and facilities. The chaplain is not required to perform

¹²Historical Review, Office of the Chief of Chaplains (Department of the Army, Washington, D. C., 1 July 1968-30 June 1969), pp. 151 and 152.

the leadership for these services nor could he do so in every case. Perhaps he could assist in obtaining leadership.

The Chief of Chaplains has recommended procedures to guide the chaplain in ministering to these persons of the newer religious groups. Following this procedure, as set forth by the Chief of Chaplains, would help to prepare the chaplain to meet the needs of these individuals. He would also be better qualified to inform the commander concerning the situation with possible recommendations toward a possible solution.¹³

In a newsletter from the Chief of Chaplains, he states in regard to the responsibilities of the chaplain:

This places a tremendous responsibility on the chaplain. He has to be alert to the variety of denominational needs in his congregation. To meet these needs requires team effort on the part of all chaplains. Chaplains can apply a variety of professional skills to meet these challenges. In addition, we should not forget the expertise contributed by lay leaders from denominations which have no chaplains or clergymen readily available.¹⁴

USAREUR and 7th Army has a program whereby lay leadership can be certified to conduct services of worship in Army Chapels throughout their respective areas. In May 1972, there were at least seventy who were certified by the USAREUR Chaplain to hold services in specific chapels. Guidelines for certification are those set forth in AR 165-20 and the USAREUR Supplement 1 to AR 165-20. Specifically, this requires the supervisory chaplain to submit a request through chaplain channels to the USAREUR Chaplain. The USAREUR Chaplain, upon receipt of this request from the supervisory chaplain, forwards a request to the particular denominational headquarters for indorsement. If the denominational headquarters

¹³Newsletter from Chaplain (Major General) Gerhardt W. Hyatt, Army Chief of Chaplains, June, 1972, p. 7.

¹⁴Newsletter from Chaplain (Major General) Gerhardt W. Hyatt, Army Chief of Chaplains, April, 1972, p. 1.

approves the request, the certification will be forwarded to the requesting chaplain. Only then is the individual authorized to act as a lay leader in a USAREUR Chapel. This certification of a lay leader is valid only in the chapel under the direction of the chaplain who made the request. The supervisory chaplain is to exercise close supervision of the lay leader.¹⁵

This program is used not only for groups with no chaplain on active duty, but also used where there is no chaplain or clergyman of the faith group within the area. This would, perhaps, alleviate many of the problems that chaplains and commanders are confronting at the present.

The attitude the chaplain has toward members of these newer religions is of great importance. Are they unwelcome challenges to the present tradition or are they helping to shed light on the mystery of God's works among men? Are they fellow-harvesters working the fields of God or are they "lost souls" and need to "be saved".

The question of evangelism and proselytism among chaplains in the military is a question with no clear cut answer. In surveying a number of chaplains within the present C-22 class--trying to get at least one from each denomination, this author was surprised how little guidance the majority received from their denominational headquarters. In the majority of instances, it seemed to be a question left up to the individual chaplain. The freedom with which some chaplains evangelize and proselytize is of great concern to a lot of people and religious groups.

¹⁵Newaletter from Chaplain (COL) Albert F. Ledebuhr, USAREUR and 7th Army, May, 1972, p. 2.

In the Historical Review, Office of the Chief of Chaplains, 15 May 1969, Chaplain (COL) Joseph B. Messing requested the Chief of Ecclesiastical Relations to insert in the monthly newsletter a statement on proselytism. In this statement Chaplain Messing gave guidelines which he felt should be used. This statement as published in the newsletter elicited a request for explanation from the executive secretary of the Commission on Chaplains and to the Military Personnel of the National Association of Evangelicals. He raised several questions and issues that must be considered.¹⁶ In this we can see that there are differing opinions among those who fall into the present Judeo-Christian faith groups.

Obviously, there is no simple answer to the question of the fairness of evangelism and proselytism. This author can only suggest that we respect the beliefs of individuals outside of our faith, that we recognize that they are also searching for a meaningful relationship with their God, and that God speaks to men in different ways. Rather than to try and convert them, why not support and help them? This endeavor on our part could do more to show them our teachings and beliefs than we could by trying to win them over to our side.

This does not mean that in those instances where an individual, as Chaplain Messing stated in his paragraph, of his own volition expressed a desire to convert, should be turned away. He should be directed to a chaplain or minister of that denomination of the individual's choice who should counsel with him and proceed in accord with the tenets of his denomination.

The chaplain in the military is charged with responsibility of assisting the commander in providing for the religious needs of all people

¹⁶Historical Review, pp. 32 and 33.

within the military. This does not mean that he has to go against the tenets of his own faith or the requirements of his own denomination. In view of this, however, his "ecumenical obligation" does not go against his denominational requirements and restrictions. It simply means that if, because of his own conscience or denominational requirements he cannot meet the religious needs of the individual, he should help to lead the individual to a chaplain or individual who can.

The author does not feel that Army Regulations in any way spell out how chaplains are to minister to military personnel and their dependents beyond the requirements for formal worship. This author feels, however, that if we personally cannot meet the religious needs of an individual, we should seek to find the individual who can. This is but a part of the responsibility we accept as chaplains.

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